Metropolis and Experience

Metropolis and Experience: Defoe, Dickens, Joyce

By

Hye-Joon Yoon

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS

PUBLISHING

Metropolis and Experience:
Defoe, Dickens, Joyce,
by Hye-Joon Yoon

This book first published 2012

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-3455-6, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-3455-1

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part III: Joyce

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by the Korea Research Foundation Grant (KRF-2007-A00216) funded by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development of the Republic of Korea.

The research for the book has been conducted at the University Library Cambridge, British Library, Senate House Library London, and Yonsei University Library. These superb libraries have furnished vital material in the different phases of my work on this topic during the past decade or so. The idea of writing on the metropolis and experience was first conceived in Cambridge, some ten years ago, where I was spending my first sabbatical leave. It saw its final completion in London during my second sabbatical. The regular labour of teaching, reading, and writing for the ten years between these two recesses has been graced by various fellow travellers, above all my students at Yonsei, in whose company I articulated and refined a large part of what finally went into this book.

As this book comes out at the mid-point of my academic career, I find myself appreciating anew my old teachers during my scholarly apprenticeship at graduate schools, in particular, Rodolphe Gasché, Irving Massey, and John Dings at Buffalo, Sung-Won Lee and Nak-chung Paik at Seoul National. Of my friends who generously supported my work, I particularly thank Peter Grieco, who read and vastly improved the manuscript. I thank also Janet Sorensen, Simon Joyce, and So Young Park, for reading and commenting on the manuscript.

But above all, the greatest support has as ever come from my beloved wife Young-Mi, who with our daughters Wonhee and Wonah, has kept the soul and body of her husband together during all these years.

All human handiworks are bound to be faulty, this book being no exception. The many blemishes of this work I acknowledge as solely mine and confess *mea culpa*. On any merit any reader may find in it, I exclaim *soli Deo gloria*.

INTRODUCTION

At a time when life-long attachment to one's spouse has become decidedly unfashionable in the West, it is odd to find how in the world of English Studies constancy to one's chosen author (and period) seems to be the norm. Or so the writer of this book was told by certain publishers wincing at its subtitle: just Defoe (and his novel-inventors' club) or Dickens (and his earnest Victorian age) or Joyce (sufficient unto himself), but not two together**,** and surely never all three. The last time we have seen a triad of novelists celebrated memorably in concert was in F. R. Leavis' *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad*. That was in 1948, more than half a century ago, when being faithful to your marital companion was better received. We change partners with lesser inhibition than the generation of the well-matched pair F. R. and Q. D. Leavis, but we jealously guard the bread-earning authors we first espoused as graduate students. This book challenges that professional monogamy, above all, by adding two more authors from two separate "fields" to the original author who helped its writer earn his doctorate and secure his salary.

Defoe, Dickens, Joyce, odd bedfellows as they may be, as members of a symposium (in Platonic style, without the flute girls) to which all three professional liars (as Plato might call them) are summoned in the name of the metropolitan modernity which affects us all, make up a party worth inviting oneself to, if for no other reason than its rarity.[1] We brought them together here not simply because they belong to some select club of "the few really great" novelists (Leavis 2)—in fact, all three failed Leavis' test of "sustained seriousness" (19)—but because of the historical relevance they bring to an inquiry into the vicissitudes of experience in the modern metropolis. The best reason to include all three in a single book is the vital span of historical urban experience which, when considered together, their works demark.

Novels have been studied, taught, and written about on a staggering scale since the mid-twentieth century, when literature departments, many of them less than half-a-century old, began to open up their curriculum to this most protean, multitudinous, and unwieldy genre. The novel's incorporation into the university curriculum, however, still poses practical problems. Unlike the eminently teachable genres of poetry, drama, or short stories, the bulky novels we discuss in this book may very well threaten to

spell logistic disaster in classrooms when covered together in a single semester. The obverse side of this uneasy institutional tenure of the long novel is the minute, quasi-religious devotion given to a handful, or even to a single great novelist of one's choice. Defoe, Dickens, and Joyce, consequently, are separately mobilized for respective "industries" of scholarship built on their tomes and tombs.

On Defoe's works is erected the discourse of the "rise of the novel," whose axis of orthodoxy runs from Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* to Michael McKeon's *The Origins of the English Novel, 1660-1740*. The title of the latter comes with a period marker, "1660-1740." The starting year reflects political history, but the closing year of "1740" is bound to remain a puzzle, whatever the author may have to say in his defence. Surely, "The Origins of the *English* Novel" is an improvement on the supreme contempt for non-English novels implied in Watt's "*The* Rise of *the* Novel," but Watt's spirit of academic territoriality is handed down to the later work undiminished. Ignoring the obvious historical and national borders, of course, has the danger (or advantage) of enabling a mythological narrative of the novel, such as Margaret Doody's *The True Story of the Novel*. The ancient Greek novels Doody eulogizes are no doubt fascinating relics, but one cannot jump centuries, peninsulas, mountains, and seas to establish an atavistic lineage from Chariton to *Clarissa*.

The mood becomes more strenuous and rigid as we move further down the centuries, for whereas eighteenth-century novels are often treated as a group (the subtitle of Watt's book being "Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding"), Victorians and Modernists tend to inspire chronic dissension: either Dickens or George Eliot, either D. H. Lawrence or Joyce, but rarely both or more. The practices of distributing academic capital to new initiates being what they are, sticking to a narrow field is always safer than being expansive. But the problem is that the habit is hard to eradicate even in one's tenured security. A Dickensian would most likely remain a "Dickensian" to his blissful retirement, a George Eliot scholar would be happy to read nothing else. Lawrence, Joyce, and Woolf, contemporaries as they are, all have their respective groups of loyal followers who refuse to understand or respect the tastes of the other parties, replicating in their scholarship with compound interest the fierce individualist animus of the authors they are dedicated to.

Valuable as these works undoubtedly are, there is something in the excessive specialization verging on author-worship (of Joyce, in particular) that goes against the very nature of the novel itself. The novel belongs to a larger world outside English departments, as popular film and television adaptations of Jane Austen or even Henry James should remind us.

Moreover, the metropolitan condition of life, which has multiple links to the genre, and which has become utterly pervasive since Defoe's age, calls for a corresponding synthetic approach crossing the period boundaries set up by faculty meetings. The classics of metropolitan novels we discuss in this book address the challenges of modernity as embodied in an urbanized world. They can and should be read in conjunction, in concert, for the metropolitan experiences they articulate ignore academic border control.

Comparative studies sewn together by thematic threads, however, are beset with their own permanent problem of which authors or fields to select or shun. Robert Alter's *Imagined Cities: Urban Experience and the Language of the Novel* is an illustrative case. Alter begins with Flaubert and ends with Kafka. Why Flaubert? Why not Balzac, for instance, who wrote more than anyone else before and after him on Paris? Alter's answer that it is because Balzac is "more a mythographer of Paris than a realist witness to the experience of the city" (Alter 7) would convince few readers aware of Balzac's meticulous portrayal of Parisian life. Alter begins with Flaubert, whose representative work *Madame Bovary* deals with the "mœurs de province" (provincial manners or ways) as its subtitle states. Alter finds neither "urban panorama" nor any "overviewing narratorial presence" in Flaubert. Instead, the "reality of the city is intimated as it impinges on the senses of the characters" (15). This may sound convincing as a description of Flaubert's *L'éducation sentimentale*, his only Parisian novel, but this single one work cannot sustain Alter's campaign to make Flaubert the founder of a new tradition of urban writing. Or perhaps genealogy is none of Alter's concern. Dickens comes after Flaubert, even though Dickens is older than Flaubert and even though his technique would be considered more old-fashioned, dominated as it is by an "overviewing narratorial presence." Joyce precedes Kafka in Alter's order. Kafka was born in 1883 one year after Joyce but died in 1924, only two years after Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). Joyce lived on and wrote something else, but *Ulysses* in itself surely has more forward-looking innovations than Kafka's works do, most of which were written before *Ulysses* and published posthumously.

Our choice and order have a clearer historical blueprint. From Defoe to Dickens, Londoners both, the metropolis becomes more complex and so do their novelistic devices. These culminate in Joyce's *Ulysses*, where the heritage of the English novel, having "risen" with Defoe, meets its joyous end. However, while history is the ultimate matrix of our inquiry, we cannot remain content with an analysis of each novel's representation of period scenes. Connecting these three writers through a merely historical approach, when they are as removed from one another in period,

circumstance, and temperament, is virtually impossible and highly unwarranted. Defoe wrote in the early eighteenth-century London and was single-minded in his devotion to constructing fraudulent autobiographies. Dickens from the early to mid Victorian period was busy responding to and cashing in on an expanding print market. Joyce, the indigent exiled artificer, thought it worth his while to spend his time displaying his narrative and linguistic virtuosity, while painstakingly reconstructing Edwardian Dublin. No literary history would allow us to bridge the gaps between these three authors; no social history can be stretched far enough to tie them. History must be well-tempered or fine-tuned by a thematic focus, which their shared preoccupation with the urban experience offers.

But before we advance further, we have to answer a possible objection to our inherently Leavisite selection of the "great novelists." The question of why focus on these writers and their novels only and not others becomes quite a contentious issue when the "others" refer to the huge mass of novels produced, consumed, and generally forgotten. Apparently disgusted by those comparatists who underplay historical differences between novels and overplay their amenability to theoretical models of their choice, Franco Moretti has weaned himself of the more conventional notion of comparative "criticism" altogether and migrated into a quantitative terrain where maps and graphs are summoned to supersede the dubious task of close reading. In doing so, Moretti assaults the notion of the qualitative uniqueness of individual works:

> As in all serial history, my object is an artificial one, because a series is never "found," but always constructed—and constructed by focusing on what is *repeatable* and can therefore turn discrete objects into a series. And this, of course, is what makes quantitative methods so repugnant to literary critics: the fear that they may suppress the uniqueness of texts. Which indeed they do. But as I don't believe in the epistemological value of the unique, its suppression doesn't really bother me. (Moretti 1998: 143)

One cannot defend perhaps the "epistemological value of the unique" epistemologically, but repetition can hardly be a solid category, either. The novel as a genre, due to its keen attachment to the book market, does seem to merit a more sober approach not blinded by the charms of individual texts. Novels proliferate and repeat themselves indeed. But even due to the purely commercial requisite of having to be a recognizably new book-commodity that justifies copyright and price tag, a novel (or any other cultural commodity) can by no means be an exact replica of its rivals. Pure repetition is as vacuous a concept as pure uniqueness; repetitions are bound to display differences and degrees in the series. Differences in a

series of cultural products call for selection and evaluation, for their shelf lives can vary considerably. However prolific the novel as a genre may be in its propagation, the works that truly matter have endured and survived many changes, promotions and denigrations. They do so, because they offer living experiences that supplement and expand our experience of living, above all, that of living in big cities, which has become the dominant mode of existence for the majority of the human kind. We have chosen the works of these three writers, each within a "constructed" series formed with other relevant writers, because, rather than simply "depicting" or "representing" urban life, they have invented distinctive modes of "experiencing" the city.

We inevitably experience the city everyday and everywhere, but we also fail to experience it. A bustling metropolis at once overwhelms and undermines its dwellers with its absolute excess of shocks and its sheer abundance of stimuli. To the depleted, dejected, disgusted subject living in a big city, these novels offer a reading experience which simulates an experience of the city as such, the city as a whole. Lewis Mumford believed that the city should be "the point of maximum concentration for the power and culture of a community," where "human experience is transformed into viable signs, symbols, patterns of conduct, systems of order" (Mumford 1938: 3). In the modern metropolis, however, human experience exceeds and eludes such communal articulations: it becomes inchoate, fleeting, schizophrenic. The very same street you pass by every day on your way to and from work you experience without fully experiencing, for you are literally a mere passer-by. The very same self you assume yourself to be falters as you move about your city. Your desire wanders away to unmentionable fantasies, transforming you into voyeur, burglar, murderer and what not in a matter of minutes or even seconds. When we attempt to conceive of the city as such, it often appears to us as a cluster of massive structures, machinery, artifacts. Those towering high-rise buildings and yellow cabs of Manhattan become the main protagonists of New York, for instance. It is in the novels that subjects can best come to terms with the problem of experiencing the metropolis, for the novels moderate between the excess and dearth of experience—the absolute overpowering of the subject by the city's grandeur and the chronic undermining of the subject by its velocity. Older literary forms such as poetry and drama can only have marginal roles to play in preserving humans as subjects in a metropolitan ambience, for they came to birth in earlier days when spatial and temporal parameters were different from those of the modern metropolis. Films merely deepen the chasm between the sensory and the intellectual capacities of the subject, as their

maximized titillations drill the viewers into becoming mere passive receptacles taking in the cinematic stimuli, say, of seeing Manhattan regularly destroyed in Hollywood disaster films.

The novel, born along with modernity itself, partakes of that peculiar mode of isolation built into the big city, the "reserve" or "aversion," in Georg Simmel's analysis, manifested as "mutual strangeness and repulsion" (Simmel 1997: 179). The novel caters to the needs of the solitary reader, as Walter Benjamin observes in "The Storyteller" (1936):

> A man listening to a story is in the company of the storyteller; even a man reading one shares this companionship. The reader of a novel, however, is isolated, more so than any other reader. . . . In this solitude of his, the reader of a novel seizes upon his material more jealously than anyone else. He is ready to take it completely his own, to devour it, as it were. (Benjamin 2002: 156)

"The birthplace of the novel," wrote Benjamin in an earlier essay "The Crisis of the Novel" (1930), "is the individual in his isolation, the individual who can no longer speak of his concerns in exemplary fashion, who himself lacks counsel and can give none" (Benjamin 2004: 299). As solitude is nowhere more poignantly felt than in the crowded cities, the novel becomes the tenuous but indispensable link of communication simulating life to the individual in his or her isolation. You read the city and its lives, and in reading them, you "seize upon" the city, making it your own—even if it never comes with any edifying "counsel." The novel is notorious for its porous openness, for the "lack of limits in the novel," which according to Georg Lukács "has a 'bad' infinity about it" (Lukács 1971: 81). The inherent incompletion of the novel, in the metropolitan context, matches the fluctuation of individual lives, their "bad infinity" of constant movement, exemplified by Defoe's Roxana, from one place to another. Even wealth, as the case of Roxana illustrates, fails to guarantee being at home in the city, for the richer you are the more restless you grow. To quote Moretti before he turned quantitative, the novel's "weak form" reflecting its "contradictory, hybrid and compromising nature" is "intrinsic to that way of existence—everyday, normal, half-unaware and decidedly unheroic—that Western culture has tried incessantly to protect and expand, and has endowed with an ever-growing significance" (Moretti 1987: 12-13). One would only need to add the qualifier "metropolitan" to this "way of existence" to adapt Moretti's assertion to our context. The novel corresponds to the "half-unaware and decidedly unheroic" metropolitan civilization which has now become truly global. The solitary, insecure,

contradictory features of metropolitan experience find their objective correlatives in the "weak" hybrid forms of *Bleak House* or *Ulysses*.

What do we precisely mean, however, by "experience" here? In what way can the isolated novelist, with no "counsel" to give, communicate to us any shared "experience"? To answer this question we need to look into the very word itself. It turns out that *experience* in English usage predominantly privileges one particular type of experience, namely experience in the sense of empirical validation of truth claims of propositions. *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the first three definitions of the word as,

> 1. The action of putting to the test; trial.
> 2. Proof by actual trial; practical demonstration.
> 3. The actual observation of facts or events, considered as a source of knowledge.

Experience in these senses has little to do with the experience novels present to the reader. This usage may be serviceable enough for business or science, but it is sorely inadequate for literary studies. In the discourse of the "rise of the novel," the "primacy of individual experience" or "apprehension of reality" based on "the immediate facts of consciousness" (Watt 15) is credited as what "formal realism" subscribes to in its claim to veracity. Defoe is granted the honour of being the first "realist" novelist, according to this criterion of experiential authorization that his narratives presumably adhere to. Yet inconsistencies and improbabilities abound in the memoirs fabricated by Defoe—just recall the sumptuous supply the wrecked ship bequeathed to Crusoe. The "individual experience" of Crusoe can never be tested experimentally, nor does the novel's "immediate facts of consciousness" square with psychological findings. We seek not knowledge, facts, or information in a novel. No one reads *Little Dorrit* to measure how quick a young girl can work with her needle, or use *Roxana* as a manual for enriching oneself as a kept mistress. *Ulysses* compares poorly with more user-friendly (and portable) guidebooks on Dublin. Most definitions of *experience* listed by *OED* are derived from this sense of gaining knowledge through trial or demonstration, but there are two significant exceptions:

> 4. a. The fact of being consciously the subject of a state or condition, or of being consciously affected by an event.
> b. In religious use: A state of mind or feeling forming part of the inner religious life; the mental history (of a person) with regard to religious emotion.

These subjective definitions are at odds with the dominant sense of tested knowledge, since they are bound to remain vague and their cognitive value dubious. For literary criticism this minority usage has obvious merits, but the dominant sense of *experience* being what it is, there is no guarantee that this particular sense will be conveyed, unless modifiers are added to guide their meaning each time (e.g. "the psychological experience of bereavement" or "the religious experience of conversion"). In this book, we choose to offset this scientific, empiricist bias of the English word by supplementing and at times replacing it with two German words for "experience": *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*.

Of the two, *Erfahrung* shares some terrain with the English *experience*, since by its very shape it implies something acquired through travel and journey (*fahren*) and therefore enjoys the authority of having been tested by experience, as in the common expressions such as "ich weiß aus Erfahrung" (I know by experience) or "sechsjährige schelchte Erfahrung" (six years' trying experience). But unlike *experience*, *Erfahrung* assumes a certain time qualification, something that one acquires through a given period of time. As the phrases above imply and as the first definition of the term in *Duden: Das Große Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* states, *Erfahrung* is "bei prakitscher Arbeit od. durch Wiederholen einer Sache gewonne Kenntnis" (to gain knowledge of something through practical work or through repetition). As Benjamin cautions us, "There is no greater error than the attempt to construe experience—in the sense of life experience [*Lebenserfahrung*]—according to the model on which the exact natural sciences are based. The decisive element here is not the causal connections established over the course of time, but the similarities that have been lived" (Benjamin 2005: 553 / Benjamin 1985: 89). This non-linear or non-mechanical temporality of *Erfahrung* has immediate implications for us, since they suggest a narrative of what one has gone through or repeated through a certain time span, which is what novels offer one way or another. But as we attempt to narrow our focus to literary representation of experience, we are detained by two further definitions in the same standard dictionary. The second and third definitions of the word are,

> 2. Erleben. Erlebnis, durch das man klüger wird.
> 3. (Phils.) durch Anschauung, Wahrnehmung, Empfindung gewonnes Wissen als Grundlage der Erkenntnis.
>
> (2. An experience through which one becomes more clever.
> (3. [Phil.] through conception, perception, sensation to gain knowledge of the foundation of cognition.)

How far *Erfahrung* can be interchangeable with *Erlebnis* is a question we shall examine a little while later, but one may point out at this stage that even in this second sense, *Erfahrung* implies a more practical kind of knowledge of particular actions: it makes one more clever and savvy (*klüger*) in getting things done. In this regard, it harmonizes with the "prakitscher Arbeit" of the first definition.

The philosophical definition of *Erfahrung*, however, demands a more detailed annotation, since it sounds quite abstruse as it stands. The time factor and the practical aspects of *Erfahrung* here have to do with the philosophical labour of investigating the basis of knowledge through reason and sensation—a very special and strange kind of work indeed. But it makes better sense when we place it in the context of the great labour of Immanuel Kant's critical philosophy. Kant describes in his introduction to *Critique of Judgement* how our cognitive faculty bids us make sense of the outside world, to turn into a "general empirical knowledge [*Erfahrungserkenntnisses überhaupt*]" or form "a consistent context of experience [*eine zusammenhängende Erfahrung*]." Experience as *Erfahrung* is the end product or the objective of our "conception, perception, sensation," but its foundation is as much subjective or conceptual as objective or empirical. For even as our cognitive faculty constructs "empirical knowledge" or a "context of experience," understanding nonetheless "recognizes it objectively as contingent, and it is merely judgement that attributes it to nature as transcendental purposiveness, i.e. a purposiveness in respect of the subject's faculty of cognition" (Kant 2008: 20-21 / Kant 1974: 95). In this picture of the subject's faculty of judgment (*Urteilskraft*), and not those of ambitious reason (*Vernunft*) or skeptical understanding (*Verstand*), presented by the great thinker's third and final *Critique*, experience is not in itself the foundation of knowledge but what is constructed as such, in full awareness of the inherent contingencies, exceptions and aberrations that may anytime dismantle it.

We are tempted here, once again, to assert how appropriate this view of *Erfahrung*, as experience constructed by the judging subject, is to a description of fiction writing and plot making. Accidental incidents are moulded in a novel to reveal a semblance of meaningful relationship and even knowledge or wisdom, based on the writer's power of judgement. One may add immediately that the metropolis and its motley crowd, through the indefatigable and sedulous labour of Balzac or Dickens are given recognizable form and semblance of "purposiveness." The later Marxist Lukács, in fact posits *Erfahrung* as a key criterion of critical distinction in his "Narrate or Describe?" (published in 1936, the same year as Benjamin's "The Storyteller").[2] In the novels of the great "realists" such

as Balzac or Tolstoy, "we experience [*erfahren*] events which are inherently significant because of the direct involvement of the characters in the events," whereas in the works of the decadent naturalists such as Flaubert or Zola "the events themselves become only a tableau for the reader or, at best, a series of tableaux" (Lukács 1970: 116 / Lukács 1971b: 202).[3] A good narrative, in other words, must come up with a significant *Erfahrung*, both in the dictionary sense of time-worn practical life experience and in the Kantian sense of contextualized purposive judgement. Flaubert and his indecisive characters, such as Frédéric Moreau of *L'éducation sentimentale*, lack purposiveness and fail to transcend contingency, Lukács would say with Kant nodding behind him.

Novels and narrative, whether they appeal to Lukács' rather exacting palate or not, are before anything else linguistic constructs. Experience, however, under any name or in any national language, does not have to be necessarily verbal. More often than not, the most unforgettable or valuable kinds of experience are hard to put in words. Experience as *Erfahrung* in its definitions traced above is no exception. Practical work or repetition, becoming clever in handling things, contemplating on the mind's workings, all of that need not be verbal or verbose. Before we can further elaborate on the literary implications of *Erfahrung*, we have to find an answer to this legitimate objection. Giorgio Agamben's thoughts on the relationship or the lack thereof between language and experience may help us here. For Agamben, experience stands outside or on the outskirts of language as the latter's "transcendental limit," but it affects language as the mark of the "difference between the human and the linguistic" pointing not merely to the arbitrariness of language but to its failure, to what Agamben calls "infancy," or one's being without language. Experience that bears the marks of "infancy" denotes the limitation and insufficiency of language, but since it is a substantive presence (we know what we have experienced, though we cannot always translate it into words), it "commits the individual to speech," while "language constitutes truth as the destiny of experience" (Agamben 1993: 58). Language and experience prompt each other, by virtue of the rupture severing them, in a relationship of reciprocal causality. One leads another to go beyond itself, to approximate "truth," which can never be final or complete, given the shortcomings of language and the "infancy" or speechlessness of experience. Yet by the same token, temporal and partial truths can be produced between language and experience, in narratives, for instance, told, received, and shared in a community acknowledging their truth or significance.

We are now prepared to resume the task of employing *Erfahrung* as a category for discussing the novel as an interaction between potentially

non-verbal experience and language. But another hurdle blocks us, for *Erfahrung* in Benjamin's "Storyteller" is strictly reserved for traditional narratives only, and not for the "solitary" and "isolated" world of writing and reading novels.

> Experience [*Erfahrung*] which is passed on from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn. . . . "When someone goes on a trip, he has something to tell about," goes the German saying, and people imagine the storyteller as someone who has come from afar. But they enjoy no less listening to the man who has stayed at home, making an honest living, and who knows the local tales and traditions. (Benjamin 2002: 144 / Benjamin 1977: 440)

In an earlier text, "Experience and Poverty" (1933), Benjamin conceived *Erfahrung* in terms of inter-generational communication, as that which is "handed down" to younger generations "with the authority of age, in proverbs" or "as tales" or "sometimes as stories from foreign lands" which the young in their turn would "find out [*erfahren*]" through their own travels (Benjamin 2005: 731 / Benjamin 1977: 214). Benjamin's conception of *Erfahrung* thus has a distinctively communal and collective profile (Nägele 128). By sharing the experience of travelling geographically, or by having embarked on life's journey, the teller and the audience set up a community of shared knowledge. To define the novel as a non-communal individualistic genre, as does Benjamin, then, is to deny its capacity of imparting *Erfahrung*.

Not all novels could possibly be the same, one may object at this point, nor must Benjamin be, after all, the most trustworthy voice to heed on matters concerning novels, which he has no sympathy for.[4] Novels can rarely offer proper *Erfahrung*? Raymond Williams, a respected critic who also wrote novels, would beg to differ. "Most novels," Williams proposes, "are in some sense knowable communities" in that "the novelist offers to show people and their relationships in essentially knowable and communicable ways" (Williams 202). This statement would apply ideally to those works presenting a smaller community which the reader is invited to join, such as the regional country novels from Jane Austen to Thomas Hardy. Would it be also relevant to our authors, to Defoe's insistently anti-social first-person narratives, as well to the gregarious novels of Dickens and Joyce? The works of these latter do profess their intention to portray a "knowable community" and to communicate shared life experience. But there are forces counteracting such gesture or intention, forces that are built into the very fabric of modern metropolitan life their works depict and embody, as Williams himself admits. "The growth of towns and

especially of cities and a metropolis" offers a stiff challenge to "any assumption of a knowable community" (Williams 202). Simmel's foundational essay on the "Metropolis and Mental Life" dissects how this is bound to be so:

> Lasting impressions, impressions which differ only slightly from one another, impressions which take a regular and habitual course and show regular and habitual contrasts—all these use up . . . less consciousness than does the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions. These are the psychological conditions which the metropolis creates. With each crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life, the city sets up a deep contrast with small town and rural life with reference to the sensory foundations of psychic life. The metropolis exacts from man as a discriminating creature a different amount of consciousness than does rural life. Here the rhythm of life and sensory mental imagery flows more slowly, more habitually, and more evenly. (Simmel 1997: 175)

The challenge such conditions offer to a novel seeking to construct a "knowable community" can be felt in Dickens, the most community-oriented among the urban novelists in English literature. The very fact that it takes such an elaborate (and often fortuitous) scaffolding to work out his typical plot of digging out hidden connections speaks for the difficulty of maintaining *Erfahrung* under the conditions of modern metropolitan life. Even in the relatively streamlined narrative of Pip acknowledging his indebtedness to Magwitch, the boundless gratitude the latter feels for the lad is based on inaccurate memory (young Pip was terrorized into bringing him food and file). Moreover, the first charitable encounter took place away from the capital in a rural setting. A warm heart is a rarity in London where enduring commitment has to cope with rapid, onrushing, unexpected contacts of busy living. The "psychological conditions" of the metropolis favors, in Simmel's analysis, the "heightened awareness and a predominance of intelligence" as vital means of preserving "subjective life against the overwhelming power" (Simmel 1997: 176) of the big city's "impersonalized spirit" (184). It is in testimony to their threatened subjectivity that Defoe's narrator-protagonists exemplify the vigilant self-interest of metropolitan psyche, as we shall show in our chapters on Defoe. This mental condition of the metropolitan subject also inspires Joyce to orchestrate the narratives of *Ulysses* in such a way as to have different episodes present differentiated views, at times almost different languages, exhibiting "sharp discontinuity," even though a semblance of "knowable community" forms part of the menu offered.

To understand the stakes and stances involved in the novel's confrontation of metropolitan modernity we need to bring in the second German word for experience, *Erlebnis*, as the dialectical counterpoint to *Erfahrung*. Experience as *Erlebnis* in *Duden*'s definition is, "von jmdm. als in einer bestimmten Weise beeindruckend erlebtes Geschehen (to impress in a distinct manner someone with a lived occurrence)." Its temporality is different from *Erfahrung* in that it is instantaneous and momentary rather than something spread through a period of time. In contrast to the continuous practical work *Erfahrung* implies, *Erlebnis* connotes a "lived (*erlebt*) moment," a distinctively memorable incident, typically accompanying a sensory, psychological, or physiological shock. If one becomes "more clever" from such experience, then it can be called "*Erfahrung*" (in the second *Duden* definition of *Erfahrung* given above). The experience in question remains an *Erlebnis* when the significance or value of the incident fails to be realized or assessed. This species of experience the metropolis never fails to supply to the individual. With "each crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life," things happen that make us alert but not a bit wiser. The metropolis is the realm *par excellence* of experience as *Erlebnis*, as Benjamin admits in one of his last essays, "Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1939):

> Baudelaire battled the crowd—with the impotent rage of someone fighting the rain or the wind. This is the nature of something lived through [*Erlebnis*] to which Baudelaire has given the weight of an experience [*Erfahrung*]. He indicated the price for which the sensation of the modern age may be had: the disintegration of the aura in the experience [*Erlebnis*] of the shock. (Benjamin 1983: 154)

The jostling, bustling, hostile crowd has nothing but *Erlebnis* to offer to the poet, which he heroically seeks to convert into *Erfahrung*, into something meaningful and communicable—against the odds, for "the city is the site of the rise of *Erlebnis* and the concomitant demise of *Erfahrung*" (Gilloch 144). That which is shocking, subjective, spurious, and hence lacks the "weight" or authority of *Erfahrung* Benjamin assigns to the domain of *Erlebnis*. For a poet who cannot do without the "aura" of subjectivity, as well as the authority and skill of rhyme, this bifurcation of experience in the city can be a tragic double bind. For the novel, however, the *Erlebnis* of the metropolis can be captured or even celebrated positively by its diffuse, disorderly, disparate prose, by the "living heteroglossia" the novel incorporates, according to Mikhail Bakhtin (Bakhtin 308). Yet as in Baudelaire's poems, *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* are

mutually complementary as well as contrastive in the metropolitan novel. Without one the other cannot stand. Without the desire to attain a level of *Erfahrung* the very act of narration cannot be continued, without the constant encounter of *Erlebnis* the novelist has nothing to write about.[5]

In Benjamin's remarks on Baudelaire, and in those quoted earlier, we can easily see how he prefers *Erfahrung* to *Erlebnis*. This has to be put in the context of the intellectual history of the times. Thanks to the privileged status Wilhelm Dilthey granted the term in his lectures in Berlin University (where both Simmel and Benjamin, fellow Berliners of Dilthey, studied), *Erlebnis* had enjoyed a fairly respectable career from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century.[6] After his death, onslaughts on the term were launched from different quarters. Martin Heidegger in "The Origin of the Work of Art" complained about the excessive use of the word, about how it became "the source that is standard not only for art appreciation and enjoyment but also for artistic creation." "Yet perhaps lived experience is the element in which art dies," he remonstrated (Heidegger, 204). More vociferous were those charges levelled at it by the Marxist Lukács. The subjectivism of the "cult" of *Erlebnis*, he claimed, is nothing but the flip side of bureaucratic objectivity (Lukács 1971b: 430-31). Dilthey, the author who boosted the status of *Erlebnis*, was attacked in *Destruction of Reason* as the "founder" of "the subjectivism of imperialist philosophy" (Lukács 1962: 373). Should we perhaps be wary of using this term burdened with such compromising allegations?

Whether Dilthey and his brainchild *Erlebnis* are culpable politically is a question we need not broach in this book, but we are obliged still to elucidate the specific meaning of *Erlebnis* as Dilthey uses it. For Dilthey, *Erlebnis* is something that is "inner," above all. It is not "the knowledge that comes from perception" but that which "receives its particular content from me through inner perception" (Dilthey 1989: 280). Such lived experiences as "sorrow *about* an event, striving *for* a good" constitute "inner relations clearly different from one another," grounded as they are in one's "psychic attitude" (Dilthey 2002: 36). Being an apprehension that is essentially "inner," it pertains to the subject's self-certainty, even though it can only be "displayed, but not defined" (Dilthey 2002: 37). It is "a distinctive and characteristic mode in which reality is there-for-me" (Dilthey 1985: 223), for the "structural unity of attitudes and contents" is what gives *Erlebnis* its coherence (Dilthey 2002: 47). That Dilthey wishes to protect the dignity of the individual subject through his concept of *Erlebnis*, in opposition to objective forces of technology and bureaucracy, seems unmistakable in these formulations**.** I can be estranged from the great impersonal systems of modern metropolis, or as in Dilthey's case,

from the Prussian state machinery, but my "inner" *Erlebnis* can still be mine legitimately and exclusively.

Without hurling huge political charges at Dilthey, we can quietly admit that the lofty pretensions of reason, the unflinching analysis of understanding, and the purposive synthesis of judgement which in Kant constituted the order of human faculties, have all fallen into disarray in Dilthey's thinking, leaving the subject with only a "qualitatively determinate reality" in lived experience (Dilthey 1985: 226). This turn to subjectivism may be due to the influence of "neo-Kantianism" and its diminution of the status and scope of Kant's comprehensive and answerable subject (Hanssen 55), or it may be a symptom of bourgeois decadence. In either case, one can hardly describe Dilthey's logic as watertight, since questions are begged rather than answered as to how *Erlebnis* can be positively self-sufficient.[7] Closer to our topic, the entrenched and callous "psychic life" of the metropolitan subject, which Simmel speaks of, can have little hope of enjoying the fulfilling inner certainty of Dithey's *Erlebnis*. We can readily concede how *Erlebnis* can only be "displayed" but never "defined" in the novels, yet unlike lyric poetry, novels also display the foibles and failures of a character or narrator who fancies that some "reality" is "there-for-me." Dilthey privileged literature as the medium of communicating *Erlebnis*, understood as the "re-experiencing of a nexus of lived experience" (Dilthey 2002: 235) distilled by a poet's subjectivity. Yet a poet's *Erlebnis* can at best be reconstructed "in accordance with the principle of analogy" (Plantinga 47). The novel, however, offers "re-experiencing" far more diversely, since it is not constrained by the originating life experience of the author but can freely exhibit different modes of subjective experience.

In using *Erlebnis* in this book as a counterpoint to *Erfahrung* we critically adopt Dilthey's subjective determination of the term while rejecting its positive assertions: it is a form of subjective attitude to contents, which, however, has no guarantee of attaining "structural unity." It may be an "inner perception" not thanks to the protections provided by a more genuine or authentic psychic realm, but in the sense that it eludes universalizing rational reflections, which, therefore, can only be "displayed, but not defined." Such instability of *Erlebnis*, in fact, Dilthey was more than aware of. "The principle of lived experience is that everything that is there for us is so only as a given in the present," he concedes (Dilthey 2002: 250). The "present," moreover, is hardly a self-standing unit, for "what we experience as present always contains the memory of what has just been present," so much so that a "lived experience" has to be understood as a "temporal sequence in which every state is in flux"

(Dilthey 2002: 216). This fluid, open, "restless advance of the present" (Dilthey 2002: 93) of *Erlebnis* seems most apposite to the metropolitan novel, as much in the first-person voices of Moll's wavering narration as in Molly Bloom's interior monologues.[8] The temporality of incomplete precarious moments of the individual subject's experience, which bears on the subject's attitude and sentiments with no promise or possibility of their articulation into a "structural unity" or "inner relations"—this is how we define *Erlebnis* for our purpose. As Rudolf A. Makkreel states, "we can have an *Erlebnis* of the present, but no *Erfahrung* of its content as presented" (Makkreel 387-88). The temporality of *Erfahrung* fosters a retrospective reflection on that which one has gone through, and which inherently is amenable to communication and transmission. The very act of narrating, of addressing the reader, however abstruse its language (as in "Proteus" episode of *Ulysses*), implicitly gestures towards *Erfahrung* in this sense. This dialectic of *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* in novelistic discourse, which intends the latter by depicting the former, is most poignantly activated in the novels dealing with the metropolitan conditions of life marked by persistent contingency. This dialectic knows no synthesis other than the tentative gesture towards solution at each nodal point in the narrative, which is what we investigate in the following chapters, each in its specific historical context.

The "metropolis," compared with "experience," has been given less coverage thus far, in part because it needs little introduction (we are all too painfully familiar with its ways and woes) but more so because it is a topic demanding to be approached as specific historical and topographical problems. We move chronologically from Defoe through Dickens to Joyce, for the historical conditions of the modern metropolis find different and distinctive articulations in this order. Defoe's London and other European cities (in *Roxana*) brimming over with the hectic drive for capital accumulation show their advanced form of development in Dickens's sprawling Victorian London, whose idiosyncrasies the author vigilantly captures in his efforts to humanize the incongruous manifold of the metropolis. By contrast, the stalemate of subordinated subjects in Dublin, the famous "paralysis" of *Dubliners*, is uplifted and stirred through the technical exuberance of *Ulysses*. The thread that runs through these different authors, periods, and texts, we weave from the concept of experience as *Erlebnis*, understood in its dialectical pairing with *Erfahrung*.

Defoe for us is the supreme novelist of *Erlebnis*, turning even a collective *Erfahrung* into *Erlebnis* as in his *Journal of the Plague Year*, conveyed by his seamless first-person narrations. The ambiguity and complexity attending this subjective approach to modernity we shall trace

from Samuel Pepys's monumental *Diary*, which presents a vivid picture of a Simmelian metropolitan psyche—calculative, restless, sensuous, self-divided—exemplified by Defoe's Moll and Roxana. What confronts and supplements Defoe's efforts to offer experience of the private subject to the reader is the numerical language of accounting and statistics (the body count in *A Journal of the Plague Year* and the money count in *Moll Flanders* or *Roxana*), which also has precedents in Pepys.

In Dickens, *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* compete with each other, at the level of style above all, which seeks to endear itself to the reader, as well as to astonish, entertain, and agitate. Writing of the crowd from the crowd, Boz creates a new platform for himself, which inherently harbours a "journalistic" tendency. Journalism, the twin or double of realist fiction for the journalist-novelists Defoe and Dickens, debilitates *Erfahrung* by its pseudo-objectivity of unreflective narration of the events. We therefore investigate extensively how the novel interacts with informative genres of journalism and travelogue in our chapters on Dickens.

Joyce's *Ulysses* confronts the fragmentation of the metropolitan subject (of Bloom and Stephen), which has grown so extreme as to dismantle the grounds of *Erlebnis*, but the very effort to keep oneself together, or alternatively, the exhilarating pleasure of schizoid self-division, produces a semblance of *Erlebnis*—a subjective experience without the subject, as it were. Unlike the English novelists, Joyce had to cope with the unappealing task of writing on the "Hibernian metropolis," many degrees removed from the imperial capital London, and with the ambivalence towards a language which to an Irish Catholic is both familiar and foreign. This leads to a series of unique configurations in Joyce that address the vicissitudes of *Erfahrung*, especially in those episodes employing third-person narration in self-deprecating and self-destructive modes.

In all these steps of our inquiry, *Erlebnis* or *Erfahrung* or any other terms or categories never hold sway as dominant master concepts subduing the concrete particulars of the texts. These terms are guides leading us to the works rather than guards restricting our passage. Despotism of "theory" (whether of Simmelian or Benjaminian or Marxian provenance) we avoid by what may at times appear to be distracting digressions on stray themes or myopic attention to textual details. Under whatever name in whatever language, experience means nothing without that openness towards the minute, the minor, and the marginal. Besides, the art of wandering the alleys and boulevards of the metropolitan novel knows how to protect its right to roam.

PART I:

DEFOE

CHAPTER ONE

FROM THE PRIVATE SPHERE

"Our Dear-self is … the End of Living"

We begin with Pepys, before Defoe, for Pepys comes before Defoe in more senses than one. Defoe was born and bred in Pepys's London. Pepys, like Defoe, was a middle-class Londoner and assiduous scribbler. But above all, Pepys the private diarist stands for the textual realm from which Defoe's novels emerge. The canonical view of Defoe scholarship makes him a direct heir to the Puritan-Dissenter tradition of spiritual autobiography and its Lockean (or Weberian) secularization (Watt 74-78; Starr 105-15; Hunter 71-72; McKeon 336). When Pepys comes under the purview of Defoe criticism, it is generally to assess the veracity of the Great Plague in Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* against Pepys's authentic records (Novak 2001: 606; Richetti 2005: 310; Backscheider 505). Pepys merits greater attention than this. Between Defoe's modernizing world and the Puritan Interregnum comes the Restoration, whose greatest prose writer, in quantity if not in quality, is Pepys. His career as a public servant in the Navy Office coincides with the Restoration itself, and the detailed, honest, and monumental journal he kept for ten years has more bearing on the "rise of the novel" than has been credited so far.

Needless to say, Pepys is no fiction writer. This meticulous and diligent public servant would have been offended to find himself in the company of story-mongers, perhaps. Moreover, it is never clear whether he wanted any other mortal to read his secret diary, posthumously published, and fully decoded only in the later decades of the past century. Yet the peculiar textuality of Pepys's diaries, written in shorthand for his private use or pleasure, reveals a vivid, lucid, and undisguised picture of a metropolitan individuality—a blueprint or x-ray of the psyche of a metropolitan subject. In and between the lines of his diary, rather than in his public duties, Pepys articulates his pure private self**.** Pepys in his journal constructs a textual realm entirely dedicated to preserving a privacy severed from the public world. This locus we may call the "private sphere," which exists within the "public sphere" but in stark separation from it.

Pepys the civil servant living in Restoration London is not quite a citizen girded with Ciceronian virtue ready to take part in the realm of *civitas*. His is a world deprived of the rights to civic political intervention. As he walks the streets of the capital, he has to pass by the lurid, macabre memento of the death of radical republican politics:

> This afternoon, going through London and calling at Crowes the upholster in Saint Bartholomew.—I saw the limbs of some of our new Traytors set upon Aldersgate, which was a sad sight to see; and a bloody week this and the last have been, there being ten hanged, drawn, and Quarterd. (20 Oct 1660 [1.269-70])[1]

With only five months or so into the Restoration of Stuart Monarchy, Pepys goes about the city on private business to see an upholsterer, but he is interrupted—this interruption is graphically marked in the text by dash—by vivid evidence of sanguine public politics. The execution of regicides (the "new Traytors") launches anew a metropolitan regime in London freed from the freedom of republican politics or any other radicalism. The reinstated Crown and Church would soon create a new category of religious-political minority, the "Dissenters" to which Defoe's family belonged, and in which circle he was educated (Novak 2001: 40-50; Backscheider 7-11; Richetti 2005: 3-9). There would be another round of rebellion and battles later in the century over the issue of Protestant succession (the so-called "Glorious Revolution"), but massive bloodshed took place away from London, in Ireland and Scotland. London remained placid politically, far too busy making money. Mob violence, such as the Gordon Riots that fascinated Dickens, rare as it was, offered no real challenge to the continuity of an urban polity that bound the private to the public with the unbreakable knots of market economy. No revolutionary violence, after Restoration, would taint Aldersgate, Saint Bartholomew, or any other locality of London. In that space cleared of politics, Pepys the public servant pursued his own private experience (*Erlebnis*) under the sign of the executed, proscribed, forbidden collective memory (*Erfahrung*) of insurrection.

Modernity begins with the ascendancy of the "public sphere" over the private spheres of household and family, according to Jürgen Harbermas (Habermas 19). It also entails the disjunction from the public sphere of the realm of individualized privacy, connected to the former in the text above only by a mere thread of a dash. Pepys frequents coffee houses which Habermas regards as the quintessential institution of the "bourgeois public sphere" (Habermas 59). Visits to coffee-houses are occasionally recorded in his journal, as in the following.

> Coming by Temple-bar, I bought Audlys *Way to be rich*, a serious pamphlett and some good things worth my minding. Thence homeward; and meeting Sir W. Batten, turned back again to a Coffee-house and there drunk more, till I was almost sick. And here much discourse, but little to be learned. (23 Jan 1663 [4.22])

But interestingly, he writes to himself how his coffee-house experience failed to yield wisdom or learning. An *Erfahrung* of public knowledge garnered from the debates and discussions at coffee houses is what he or other visitors expect, but Pepys merely leaves the place "almost sick" from drinking coffee, gathering "little to be learned" from the profuse "discourse" there. On this as in other days he recollects his daily deeds and thoughts, yet the private subject collects no meaning from his day spent in part at a coffee house. Instead, the *Erlebnis* of physical reaction, of being "almost sick," is what he finds himself remembering, rather than what he heard there.

Privacy in Pepys exists in a subordinate position vis-à-vis the public realm. The passage quoted above, coming at the end of the day's entry, reads almost like an incidental footnote on his body (feeling sick), appended to the record of what he had done that day in the public space (purchasing books and visiting coffee houses). The very secrecy of Pepys's journal written in coded shorthand speaks of the need to protect it from the pressure of the public social life of the writer as civil servant, head of a family, and aspiring Londoner with extensive connections. Or, if his shorthand's value lies in its facility and speed rather than secrecy, as Harry Berger argues (Berger 575-76), it further attests to the force of his public habit over his most intimate private activity. But apart from the question of the peculiar textuality of his diary, there stands the very fact of his mode of living off his public occupation, which underlines the derivative relationship of the private to the public. The private is that which is left to him after all public duties and works have been deducted from it.[2] If Pepys's journal registers an important stage in "that long, long history of change from the sense of the private world as the scene of privation to that of plenitude" (Pooley 88), it does so by securing the private realm as the remainder, as that which is reserved, financially and otherwise, for private appropriation.

Taking advantage of the good fortune that had placed him at the Navy Office (i.e. of his having been personal secretary to Edward Montague, later created 1st Earl of Sandwich, who was responsible for bringing Charles II back to England), he made good use of his talents and position to serve his private interests, as well as those of his king. "The charm and vivacity of his personality have combined with the immensity of his public